

**SUMMARY OF 2003 CENSUS OF
AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHERS IN MASSACHUSETTS**

Compiled by:

**Scott M. Melvin
Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Westborough, MA 01581**

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SUMMARY OF 2003 MASSACHUSETTS PIPING PLOVER CENSUS DATA

INTRODUCTION

The American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus) is a large, strikingly colored shorebird that nests on coastal beaches along the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida. Although it has been rapidly expanding its range and increasing in abundance in New England over the past 50 years, this expansion is believed to be a recolonization of formerly occupied habitat rather than a bona fide range extension. On a continental scale, the American Oystercatcher is one of the most uncommon species of breeding shorebird in North America, and has been designated a *Species of High Concern* in the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan (Brown et. al. 2001), partly because of its relative rarity.

This report summarizes data collected during a statewide census of American Oystercatchers in Massachusetts during the 2003 breeding season, conducted by a variety of cooperating agencies and organizations. It follows a similar statewide census conducted in 2002 (Melvin 2003).

METHODS

Data on American Oystercatcher abundance, distribution, and reproductive success were collected by a coast-wide group of cooperators composed of full-time and seasonal biologists, beach managers, researchers, and volunteers. This is the same group that conducts annual censuses of Piping Plovers and terns in Massachusetts (Melvin and Mostello 2003, Mostello 2003).

Observers censused adult oystercatchers during or as close as possible to a designated census period of 24 May - 1 June, in order to minimize double-counting of birds that might move between multiple sites during the breeding season. The 2003 census period was a week earlier than in 2002 (1-9 June) in order to more closely target the peak of oystercatcher nesting statewide, when we felt breeding pairs might be most accurately censused. Abundance was reported for each site both as total number of adults (pairs, single birds and groups of apparently unpaired birds) and number of breeding pairs (pairs of adult birds with nests or chicks or that exhibit territorial, courtship, or distraction behavior at a site).

Cooperators were asked to report numbers of young fledged for each pair, if known. Chicks were considered to have fledged if they survived to ≥ 25 days of age or were able to fly, whichever occurred first. We also asked cooperators to report numbers and locations of assemblages of post-breeding oystercatchers and the dates observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observers reported totals of at least 376 adults and 184 pairs of American Oystercatchers at 69 sites in Massachusetts in 2003 (Table 1). The small discrepancy between number of adults and number of pairs is due to reports of several small groups of adults during the census period for which pairing status could not be determined. No oystercatchers were detected at an additional 107 sites that were surveyed. The largest numbers of breeding pairs were reported from Lower Cape Cod (46 pairs), Martha's Vineyard (40), Nantucket (39), Bristol County (19), and the Boston Harbor Island (15) (Table 2). Individual sites with the largest numbers of pairs were the Coskata-Coatue area of Nantucket (27 pairs), South Monomoy Island (18), North Monomoy Island ((13), South Beach in Chatham (7), Norton Point Beach in Edgartown (7), and Sylvia State Beach and Sengekontacket Pond in Edgartown (7). In contrast, no breeding oystercatchers were reported from 8 sites surveyed along the South Shore, and only 5 adults of uncertain breeding status were reported from 7 sites on the North Shore.

Statewide, at least 88 chicks were reported to have fledged from 152 pairs for which productivity could be determined, for an overall productivity of 0.58 chicks fledged per pair. However, this is likely an substantial underestimate of actual fledging rate, given that at many sites oystercatcher chicks are wary and difficult to monitor, and numbers of fledged chicks may have been underestimated at several of the largest breeding sites in the state, for example North and South Monomoy islands.

The largest reported post-breeding concentrations of oystercatchers were at North Monomoy Island (170 birds on 23 August); Coatue, Nantucket (39 on 3 July); The Glades, Nantucket (33 on 4 August); Smith Point, Nantucket (18 on 4 July); Eel Point, Nantucket (16 on 23 July); The Haulover, Nantucket (15 on 15 July); and South Monomoy Island (14 on 17 July).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere thanks to the many biologists, seasonal shorebird monitors, beach managers, landowners, and volunteers that participated in monitoring and protection efforts for American Oystercatchers and other coastal waterbirds in Massachusetts in 2002. This work was carried out by cooperators from state and federal agencies, local municipalities, county governments, private conservation groups, and universities. We especially thank all the individuals who participated in population monitoring and submitted the data that are summarized in this report.

LITERATURE CITED

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Table 1. Results of 2003 census of American Oystercatchers in Massachusetts.

Location	Total adults^a	Total pairs^a	No. chicks fledged^b	No. pairs with fledge data^c	Source^d
NORTH SHORE					
Salisbury Beach - North, Salisbury	0	0	0	0	SvO
Salisbury Beach -South., Salisbury	0	0	0	0	SvO
Woodbridge Island, Newburyport	3 ^e	? ^e	nd ^f	0	DM
Plum Island town beaches, Newburyport/Newbury	0	0	0	0	DM
Parker River NWR, Newbury/Rowley	0	0	0	0	DM
Sandy Point State Res., Ipswich	0	0	0	0	DM
Crane Beach, Ipswich	2	0	0	0	FI
Coffin's Beach, Gloucester	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Wingaersheek Beach, Gloucester	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Good Harbor Beach, Gloucester	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
BOSTON HARBOR					
Logan Airport	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Rainsford Island	4	2	nd	0	CT
Lovell's Island	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Great Brewster Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Middle Brewster	2	1	nd	0	CT
Gallops Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Thompson Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Spectacle Island	nd	nd	nd	nd	CT
Calf Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Peddocks Island	4	2	nd	0	CT
Snake Island	4	2	nd	0	CT
Hangman Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Sheep Island	2	1	nd	0	CT
Sarah Island	4	2	nd	0	CT

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledge data ^c	Source ^d
SOUTH SHORE					
Third Cliff, Scituate	0	0	0	0	SL,DC, JA
Fourth Cliff, Scituate	0	0	0	0	SL,DC, JA
Rexhame Beach, Marshfield	0	0	0	0	SL,DC, JA
Duxbury Beach, Duxbury/Plymouth	0	0	0	0	SL, DC, JA
Plymouth Beach, Plymouth	0	0	0	0	SL, DC, JA
Ellisville, Plymouth ^g	0	0	0	0	SL, DC, JA
Sagamore Beach, Bourne and Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Scusset Beach State Res., Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
UPPER CAPE					
Mashnee Dike, Bourne	0	0	0	0	MB
Bassetts Island, Bourne	nd	nd	nd	nd	—
Black Beach/Sippewisset, W. Falmouth	0	0	0	0	MB
Woodneck Beach, W. Falmouth	0	0	0	0	MB
Washburn Island, Falmouth	2	1	0	1	CB
South Cape Beach, Mashpee	0	0	0	0	CB
New Seabury, Mashpee	0	0	0	0	CB
Rock Landing/Maushop Village, Mashpee	0	0	0	0	CB
Popponesset Spit, Mashpee	0	0	0	0	MB
Town Neck Beach, Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Springhill Beach, Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
East Sandwich Beach, Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Scorton (Neck) Creek, Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Scorton Shores, Sandwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Sandy Neck, Barnstable	2	1	0	1	KL
Sampson's Is.-Dead Neck, Barnstable	0	0	0	0	MB

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledge data ^c	Source ^d
Bone Hill Road, Barnstable	0	0	0	0	MB
Dowse's Beach, Osterville	0	0	0	0	MB
Long Beach, Centerville	0	0	0	0	MB
Squaw Island, Hyannisport	0	0	0	0	MB
Kalmus Park Beach, Hyannis	0	0	0	0	MB
Gray's Beach, Yarmouth	2	1	0	1	MB
Seagull Beach/Radio City, Yarmouth	0	0	0	0	MB
Great Island, Yarmouth	2	1	0	1	CBo, MB
Bass River Beach, Yarmouth	0	0	0	0	MB
West Dennis Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Chapin Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Mayflower Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Howes St. Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Town Landings, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Corporation Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Sesuit Beach, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Quivett Neck/Coles Pond, Dennis	0	0	0	0	MB
Wings Island, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Paine's Creek, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Robbins Hill Beach, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Town Beach, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Ellis Launching Beach, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Linell Landing Beach, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Crosby's Landing Beach, Brewster	0	0	0	0	MB
Merkel Beach/Wychmere, Harwichport	0	0	0	0	MB
Red River Beach, Harwich	0	0	0	0	MB
Allens Harbor, Harwich	0	0	0	0	MB

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledge data ^c	Source ^d
LOWER CAPE					
Forest Beach, Chatham	0	0	0	0	MB
Cockle Cove/Ridgevale Beach, Chatham	0	0	0	0	MB
Harding Beach, Chatham	0	0	0	0	MB
Harding Beach Point, Chatham	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
North Monomoy Island, Chatham	26	13	1 ^g	13	FWS
South Monomoy Island, Chatham	36	18	5 ^g	18	FWS
Minimoy	8	4	5	4	FWS
South Beach, Chatham	14	7	1	6	MJ
Tern Island, Chatham	2	1	0	1	MJ
Nauset Beach, Chatham	2	1	0	1	HB
Nauset Beach, Orleans	0	0	0	0	BW
Nauset Spit (Heights), Orleans	0	0	0	0	BW
New Island, Orleans	≥ 1 ^h	0 ^h	0	0	MH
Skaket Beach, Orleans	0	0	0	0	MB
Rock Creek (north side), Orleans	0	0	0	0	MB
First Encounter Beach, Eastham	0	0	0	0	MB
Coast Guard Beach, Eastham	0	0	0	0	MH
Marconi Beach/LeCount Hollow, Wellfleet	0	0	0	0	MH
Sunken Meadow Spit, Wellfleet	nd	nd	nd	nd	—
Lieutenant's Island, Wellfleet	nd	nd	nd	nd	—
Indian Neck, Wellfleet	nd	nd	nd	nd	—
Jeremy Point/Great Island, Wellfleet	4	2	0	2	MH
Duck Harbor, Wellfleet	0	0	0	0	MH
Bound Brook, Wellfleet	0	0	0	0	MH
Pamet Harbor-South, Truro	0	0	0	0	MB
Pamet Harbor-North/Corn Hill Beach, Truro	0	0	0	0	DSe, MB
Pond Village Beach, Truro	0	0	0	0	MB

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledge data ^c	Source ^d
Pilgrim Beach/Beach Point, Truro	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Ballston Beach/Newcomb Hollow, Truro	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
Longnook Beach, Truro	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
Highland Beach, Truro	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
High Head/Head of the Meadow/Highland Beach, Truro	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
Race Point-South Beach, Provincetown/Truro	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
Race Point-North Beach, Provincetown	0	0	0	0	ES, KK
Provincetown Harbor	nd	nd	nd	nd	
Long Point/Wood End, Provincetown	2	0	0	0	ES, KK
BRISTOL COUNTY					
Stony Point Dike, Wareham	6	3	0	3	ND, MB
Long Beach Point, Wareham	0	0	0	0	ND, MB
Little Harbor Beach, Wareham	0	0	0	0	ND, MB
Ram Island, Marion	2	1	nd	0	JH
Strawberry Point, Mattapoisett	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Nasketucket Point, Mattapoisett	2	1	nd	0	JLa
South Shore Marshes WMA, Mattapoisett	2	1	nd	0	CM,
Pea Island, Mattapoisett	0	0	0	0	CM,
Wards Rock, Fairhaven	2	1	nd	0	JH
West Island, Fairhaven	2	1	nd	0	JB
Winsegansett Heights, Fairhaven	2	1	0	1	JB
Round Hill Beach, Dartmouth	2 ¹	1 ¹	0	0	JB
Salters Pond, Dartmouth	2 ¹	1 ¹	nd	0	JB
Demarest Lloyd State Park, Dartmouth	2	1	nd	0	JB
Little Beach/Barney's Joy, Dartmouth	10	5	nd	0	AP, GP
Gooseberry Neck, Westport	0	0	0	0	JB
Horseneck Beach, Westport	0	0	0	0	JB

Location	Total adults^a	Total pairs^a	No. chicks fledged^b	No. pairs with fledged data^c	Source^d
Westport River	2	1	0	1	JB
Acoaxet, Westport	0	0	0	0	MQ
Cockeast Pond, Westport	0	0	0	0	MQ
Richmond Pond, Westport	0	0	0	0	MQ
Bay Point, Swansea	0	0	0	0	AW
ELIZABETH ISLANDS					
Naushon Island	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Weepecket Islands	2	1	0	1	JH
Pasque Island-Robinson's Hole	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Pasque Island-Cobbly	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Pasque Island-Quick's Hole	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Nashawena Island-Quick's Hole	0	0	0	0	JH
Nashawena Island - North Harbor	2	1	nd	0	JH
Nashawena Island-Canapitsit	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Cuttyhunk Island	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Penikese Island	10	5	3	3	CM
Ram Island	10	5	0	5	CM
Bird Island	2	1	0	1	JH
MARTHA'S VINEYARD					
Eastville Point Beach, Oak Bluffs	2	1	1	1	RC, DS
Harthaven, Oak Bluffs	0	0	0	0	DS
Sylvia State Beach/Sengekontacket Pond, Edgartown	12	6	1	6	DS, RC
Cow Bay, Edgartown	0	0	0	0	DS
Eel Pond/Little Beach/Lighthouse Beach, Edgartown	8	4	3	4	DS
Chappaquiddick Point Beach, Chappaquiddick	0	0	0	0	DS
Caleb's Pond, Chappaquiddick	2	1	nd	0	DS

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledged data ^c	Source ^d
Cape Pogue Elbow/The Narrows, Chappaquiddick	6	3	0	3	KC
Arruda's Pt./The Jetties/Little Neck, Chappaquiddick	6	3	0	3	KC
Leland/East Beaches, Chappaquiddick	8	4	0	4	KC
Wasque, Chappaquiddick	2	1	0	1	KC
Norton Point Beach, Edgartown	12	6	7	6	RC, NDu, DS
South Beach, Edgartown	nd	nd	nd	nd	—
Edgartown Great Pond/Job's Neck, Crackatuxet Pd., Edgartown	2	1	0	1	DS, LJ
Oyster and Paqua Ponds, Edgartown	2	1	nd	0	DS, LJ
Watcha Pond, W. Tisbury	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Tisbury Great Pond/Black Point Pond/Quansoo/Long Point, Chilmark ^j	4	2	0	2	DS, LJ
Chilmark Pond, Chilmark	2	1	0	1	DS, LJ
Lucy Vincent Beach, Chilmark	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Menemsha Beach	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Stonewall Beach	2	1	0	1	DS, LJ
Long Beach/Squibnocket Beach, Chilmark	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Menemsha Beach, Menemsha	0	0	0	0	DS, SJ
Moshup Trail Beach/Philbin Beach, Aquinnah	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Dogfish Bar, Aquinnah	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Lobsterville Beach, Aquinnah	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Cedar Tree Neck/Lambert's Cove, West Tisbury	0	0	0	0	DS, LJ
Great Rock Bight Preserve	0	0	0	0	EH
Sepiessa Point Reservation	0	0	0	0	EH
Tashmoo, Tisbury	2	1	nd	0	DS, LM
Wilfred's Pd. and Mink Meadows Beach, Vineyard Haven	0	0	0	0	DS, EH, LM
Northern Pines Shores, Vineyard Haven	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Lagoon Pond, Vineyard Haven	2	1	nd	0	LR

Location	Total adults ^a	Total pairs ^a	No. chicks fledged ^b	No. pairs with fledged data ^c	Source ^d
Nomans Land	6	3	≥ 1	1	SK
NANTUCKET					
Great Point/The Galls	6	3	4	3	TTOR
Coskata-West Beach ^k	0	0	0	0	TTOR
Coskata-Inner Trail ^l	0	0	0	0	TTOR
Coatue	24	12	15	12	JL, KB
Coskata-East Beach/The Glades ^m	20	10	11	10	TTOR
Coskata Inlet/The Haulover ⁿ	10	5	5	5	JL, KB
Wauwinet	0	0	0	0	ST
Squam Pond	0	0	0	0	JL, KB, ST
Quidnet/Sesachacha Pond	0	0	0	0	ST
Low Beach	0	0	0	0	LMi
Surfside	0	0	0	0	ST
Hummock Pond	0	0	0	0	JL, KB
Smith Point	6	3	5	3	ER
Eel Point	8	4	6	8	JL, KB
Dionis Beach	nd	nd	nd	nd	-
Quaise Point	2	1	0	1	ST
Ram Island (Polpis Harbor)	0	0	0	0	JL, KB
Jacksons Point	2	1	3	1	AB
Tuckernuck Island	10	5	7	3	RV, MM, EM
Muskeget Island	10	5	2	5	RV, MM, EM
TOTALS	≥ 376	184	≥ 86	149	

^a Observers censused adult oystercatchers during or as close as possible to 24 May - 1 June. *Total adults* includes pairs, single birds, and groups of apparently unpaired birds. *Total pairs* are defined as pairs of adult birds with nests or chicks or that exhibit territorial, courtship, or distraction behavior at a site.

^b *Chicks fledged* are defined as chicks ≥ 25 days of age or observed in flight, whichever occurs first.

^c *Numbers of pairs with fledge data* includes all pairs for which it was determined how many chicks fledged, including pairs that did not nest, pairs that nested unsuccessfully, and pairs with broods from which no chicks fledged.

^d Key to sources: AB = Amanda Bixby, AP = Alan Poole, AW = Anthony Waring, BW = Barbara Walsh, CB = Christina Bird, CBo = Christine Boukamp, CM = Carolyn Mostello, CT = Carol Trocki, DC = David Clapp, DG = David Gould, DM = Deborah Melvin, DS = Debra Swanson, DSe = Dick Seed, EH = Esther Hartmann, EM = Emily Molden, ER = Edie Ray, ES = Eric Schneider, FI = Franz Ingelfinger, FWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, GP = Gina Purtell, HB = Holly Busse, JA = Julia Auckland, JB = Jamie Bogart, JH = Jeremy Hatch, JLa = Jack Lash, JL = Jerome Light, Jr. , KC = Kate Condé, KB = Karen Beattie, KK = Katie Kughen, KL = Katie L'Heureaux, LJ = Luanne Johnson, LM = Lynette Martin, LMi = Larry Miller, LR = Lloyd Raleigh, MB = Matt Bailey, MH = Mary Hake, MJ = Martha Jason, MM = Marie Martin, MQ = Marie Quintin, ND = N. Donkin, NDU = Nathan Durawa, RC = Robert Culbert, RV = Richard Veit, SJ = Susan Jones, SK = Stephanie Koch, SL = Steve Liptay, ST = Sarah Treanor, SvO = Susi von Oettingen, TTOR = The Trustees of Reservations.

^e Uncertain if a group of 3 oystercatchers observed at Woodbridge Island contained a breeding pair.

^f nd = no data available

^g Numbers of chicks that survived to fledge on North and South Monomoy Islands were probably underestimated because of the wariness of the family groups and the difficulty of detecting chicks once they moved into salt marsh vegetation.

^h Oystercatcher tracks were observed on New Island on 28 May and 2 June, but number of bids could not be determined and there was no evidence to suggest the presence of a breeding pair.

ⁱ A pair of oystercatcher seen frequently at Salters Pond was believed to be the same birds seen occasionally at Round Hill Beach. This pair is reported here for both sites, but tallied only once in regional and state totals.

^j This site also includes the Lewis property and Long Point Wildlife Refuge.

^k Coskata-West Beach refers to the beach along the Nantucket Sound side of Coskata, from the south end of The Galls south and west to the boundary of Coatue.

^l Coskata-Inner Trail refers to the inland trail running south and west from Coskata toward Coatue.

^m Coskata-East Beach refers to the beach along the eastern (Atlantic) side of Coskata, including the washover at The Glades.

ⁿ Coskata Inlet is the inlet from Nantucket Harbor into Coskata Pond.

Table 2. Regional abundance of American Oystercatchers in Massachusetts, 2003.

Region	Total adults	Total pairs	Sites censused	Sites with oystercatchers^a
North Shore	5	? ^b	7	1
Boston Harbor	30	15	11	11
South Shore	0	0	8	0
Upper Cape	8	4	42	4
Lower Cape	≥ 95	46	30	9
Bristol Co.	34	17	22	14
Elizabeth Islands	26	13	6	5
Martha's Vineyard ^b	80	40	32	17
Nantucket	78	39	17	8
Tuckernuck, Muskeget	20	10	2	2
Totals	≥ 376	184	176	69

^a Includes both paired and unpaired adults.

^b Uncertain if group of 3 oystercatchers at Woodbridge Island, Newburyport contained a breeding pair.

^c Includes Nomans Land.